

CROSSROADS

An interdisciplinary journal for the study
of history, philosophy, religion and classics

SPECIAL ISSUE – LUIZ COSTA LIMA REJOINDER

VOLUME IV ISSUE II 2010

ISSN: 1833-878X

Pages 3-5

Matthew Lamb
Guest Editor

Editorial

This is the second Special Issue that has concentrated on the work of Luiz Costa Lima. In 2008, *Crossroads* published an issue (2:2) to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the English translation and publication of *Control of the Imaginary: Reason and Imagination in Modern Times* (1988). That brought together a selection of Costa Lima's work covering the period 1980-2008, many of which were made available in English for the first time. This issue brings together a number of essays from international scholars responding to this work.

The impetus for this project has been purely selfish, although I am sure I should dress it up more in terms of 'enlightened self-interest.' But the facts speak for themselves: in 2004, while working in a library, I kept noticing a book that nobody ever borrowed, and was drawn to its intriguing title: *The Dark Side of Reason: Fictionality and Power* (1992). As a strong believer that one should almost always judge a book by its cover (or, at least, by its title), I finally borrowed it and was intrigued enough by the contents to track down the only other books I could find in English, with equally intriguing titles: *Control of the Imaginary* (1988) and *The Limits of Voice* (1996). I cannot say, at first, that I entirely understood Costa Lima's arguments, drawn from so many intellectual fields. But in 2005 I began a research project on Albert Camus and I found that many of the questions that I was raising found a response in these mysterious books from Brazil. Finally, in 2006 I tracked down an email address for Costa Lima and contacted him to inquire if his book, *Mimesis: desafio ao pensamento* (2000), was going to be translated into English. I still have his reply:

Your e-mail presents a double surprise to me: first that my book has arrived to Australia; second that you are able to read such an unknown language as Portuguese. Unfortunately, this is so exceptional that I have no hope to see my book translated into English.

He was not deterred by my subsequent admission that I did not indeed know Portuguese ('No, you have not spoiled my wonder,' he replied: 'it only received another direction'). And for a couple of years Costa Lima patiently answered my many questions, and cleared up my many errors, all of which, I am sure, would have dissipated instantly if only I had access to the other eighteen books he has published in Portuguese since 1966. (In our correspondence he has said: 'In fact, I wrote too much,' referring to a bibliography I asked him to compile for me, which he called 'this mountain of pages'). It was out of this frustration that I conceived of the project of the first Special Issue: solely, to enable me a glimpse at this mountain, like the protagonist in Kafka's *The Castle*, endlessly trying to find my way out the village at its foot. That this may be of benefit to others is merely a by-product.

These glimpses have become to me like fragments of some Ancient text recovered and presented to the world. They have increased my understanding ten-fold of Costa Lima's work, and helped immeasurably in my work on Camus. This second Special Issue has only compounded both my understanding and my frustration. Many of the scholars here have known Costa Lima for many years, have worked with him, been influences on him, and been influenced by him. It is with no small degree of envy that I therefore introduce this issue. It is also with gratitude toward Costa Lima's work that it has opened my eyes to other work which I would otherwise not have been exposed to. Two examples may suffice. The first paper in this issue is an intellectual auto/biographical sketch by Hans Ulrich ('Sepp') Gumbrecht. I first read Sepp's name in the opening chapter of *Control of the Imaginary*, as presenting a seminar in Brazil in the early 80s that sparked off Costa Lima's early intuitions into mimesis and the control of the imaginary. Gumbrecht's own books – notably, *The Powers of Philology* (2003) and *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (2004) – have been like the discovery of fire to me, even (especially!) where they diverge from Costa Lima's own interests. Likewise, discovering K. Ludwig Pfeiffer – who wrote the afterward to the German translation of *Control of the Imaginary* – is to me the intellectual equivalent of manufacturing ice (an invention of great practical wonderment for those of us born along the tropic of Capricorn). His idea of the protoliterary – from his book, *The Protoliterary: Steps Toward an Anthropology of Culture* (2002) – form the basis of his contribution to this Special Issue.

There are roughly two types of essays in this Special Issue. The first lot – by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Pedro Dolabela Chagas, Gabriele Schwab, Marília Librandi Rocha, and Flávia Maria Schlee Eyler – are remarkable because they provide, for the first time in English, an excellent overview of Costa Lima's thinking, and the intellectual context out of which it has emerged. Significantly, each of these papers draws upon work only otherwise available in Portuguese. The rest of the papers – by Kathrin Rosenfield, Raymond Lam, Frans Weiser, K. Ludwig Pfeiffer, as well as my own paltry offerings – are all practical attempts to engage with Costa Lima's ideas in relation to various texts and ideas.

Once more, I am thankful to the *Crossroads* team for indulging me in this project, especially Sheldon Peters for digitising and uploading all these pieces to the web; to the contributors who have done most of the work and for providing me (oh, and maybe others) a greater understanding of these remarkable ideas; and especially to Luiz Costa Lima for writing 'too much.' May you write much more (preferably in English...).

Enjoy.